

Fair but not Equal: Negotiating the Division of Unpaid Labour in Same-Sex Couples in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia

Alice Beban & Glenda Roberts

To cite this article: Alice Beban & Glenda Roberts (2024) Fair but not Equal: Negotiating the Division of Unpaid Labour in Same-Sex Couples in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, LGBTQ + Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 20:1, 74-91, DOI: [10.1080/27703371.2023.2285276](https://doi.org/10.1080/27703371.2023.2285276)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/27703371.2023.2285276>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC



Published online: 29 Nov 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 427



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Fair but not Equal: Negotiating the Division of Unpaid Labour in Same-Sex Couples in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia

Alice Beban and Glenda Roberts

School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Research suggests that same-sex couples have a more egalitarian approach to the division of labor (DOL) than different-sex couples. Based on multi-stage interviews with ten same-sex couples in Aotearoa NZ and Australia, we analyze how couples negotiate, perform, and perceive the fairness of their division of reproductive household labor. We found that same-sex couples had diverse patterns of dividing labor, and most were not equally sharing housework. Yet, most couples felt their DOL was fair. We argue that three key factors enabled participants to construct their DOL fairly, even when unequal: flexibility in allocating labor, communication, and revaluing unpaid labor as equal to paid labor, as an act of love, which can be culturally significant. Most participants explained their labor division as pragmatic, based on availability and preference, rather than gender, supporting theories of relative resources and time availability in shaping fairness perceptions. However, all participants were aware of how gender shaped their relationships, and some consciously sought to undo gender and heteronormativity through their labor practices. This study contributes to academic theorizing of how LGBTQ+ families “do gender” and “do heteronormativity” through unpaid labor and affirms the importance of intersectional analysis for understanding labor practices and perceptions.



KEYWORDS

Same-sex couples’ division of labor; fairness perceptions; unpaid labor; LGBTQ+ families; social reproduction

Introduction

Exploring the division of labor (DOL) within non-binary, transgender and same-sex couples can increase understanding of how people in contemporary relationships in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) divide unpaid household labor, and how they perceive the fairness of this division. There is value in understanding how “same-sex couples ‘queer housework’—that is, resist, destabilize, and transform accepted (heteronormative) meaning systems surrounding housework—which can possibly be applied to all couples” (Goldberg, 2013, p. 87). Studies suggest that same-sex couples have a more equitable approach toward sharing housework and child-care than heterosexual couples (Carlson et al., 2020; Church, 2020; Goldberg, 2013; Umberson et al., 2015). Daminger (2020, p. 813) even argues that the division of labor for same-sex couples reflects an “ideal world...with close to a 50/50 split”. However, this ‘ideal world’ is often assumed rather than interrogated (Henrickson, 2010), and there is less research that analyses what factors contribute to this apparent egalitarian ethic and how same-sex couples negotiate and construct their perceptions of the fairness of their DOL in everyday life.

We embarked on this research during Covid-19, when pandemic lockdowns precipitated increased research attention to understanding the division of unpaid labor among heterosexual

CONTACT Alice Beban  a.beban@massey.ac.nz  School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University, 1 Tennant Dive, Palmerston North, Manawatū, New Zealand.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

couples in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand (Bahn et al., 2020; Baxter, 2021; Borah Hazarika & Das, 2021). However, this research gave little attention to how same-sex couples navigate the division of unpaid labor (Cf. Craig & Churchill, 2021). Our study explored how couples perform, negotiate, and perceive the division of reproductive household labor. We undertook multi-stage interviews with ten same-sex couples, including six couples in Aotearoa NZ and four couples in Australia. We undertook a couple interview and subsequent individual interviews during which participants completed a time use survey. This methodology enabled us to understand how couples discursively construct the division of labor, and how labor practices relate to perceptions. The research questions were: How do people in long-term same-sex relationships in Australia and Aotearoa NZ divide unpaid labor, and how do they construct perceptions of their division of unpaid labor as (un)fair? How do intersectional factors (including gender, cultural background, age etc) shape the division of labor and fairness perceptions?

We contribute to two under-researched areas in the literature. First, most studies on same-sex couples' DOL are based in the US and Europe; here, we focus on couples in Aotearoa NZ and Australia. Existing Australia and Aotearoa NZ studies focus primarily on heterosexual couples' DOL and are prone to binary-based gender assumptions, for example, that "gender would not be informative about how housework is shared within same-sex couples" (Baxter, 2021, p. 2). The few studies including same-sex couples focus primarily on the impacts of discrimination and stigma on same-sex parented families (Crouch et al., 2014; Dempsey, 2013; Perlesz et al., 2010). Thus, the present study is an important addition to this growing literature and may provide contrasts with US-focused research. In contrast to the US, both Australia and Aotearoa NZ are highly secularized, settler societies, with growing visibility of same-sex family units, and marriage equality legislation enacted in the past decade (Dempsey, 2013; Dickson et al., 2013). However, people who identify as LGBTIQ+ still experience higher than average rates of violence and discrimination (Hill et al., 2020; Ministry of Justice, 2021). People in same-sex couples in Aotearoa NZ have reported more support from families than equivalent American data, which may be due to lower levels of religiosity (Henrickson, 2006). Culturally, both countries are highly diverse. Indigenous New Zealanders (Māori), for example, place high cultural value on unpaid labor for collective benefit and have a traditionally fluid understanding of sexuality (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007). Non-Indigenous New Zealanders and Australians descend from migrants from diverse backgrounds, and we posit that these different cultural influences may also shape perceptions and practices of unpaid labor.

Second, while many studies take a single analytical lens of sexuality as the referent point, here we foreground intersectionality. We examine how sexuality interacts with other axes of social power including gender, ethnic and cultural background, age, and class to shape the performance and perceptions of unpaid labor in same-sex couples (Crenshaw, 1991). Rather than deductively selecting intersectional categories at the outset of the study, we approached intersectionality as an analytic tool for 'understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world' (Hill Collins & Bilgeaspin, 2016, p. 25) by identifying the specific 'multiple social dynamics in conversation with one another' (Clarke & McCall, 2013, p. 350) Thus, we were attentive to various intersectional dynamics that emerged as important for each couple's dynamics, including gender, while also being careful not to assume that this was the most significant attribute in shaping labor practices and perceptions, or to suggest that participants who represented a particular gender or cultural background were representative of broad views of this group.

In the following section, we review the literature on unpaid labor, the gendered DOL, and the theoretical frameworks of relative resources, time availability, distributive justice, and 'doing gender' that help explain DOL and fairness perceptions. Following a discussion of methodology, our findings are structured as follows: first, we explore how participants estimated their DOL, and how and why they saw their DOL as fair or unfair. Second, we analyze three key factors that shaped the sense of fairness of DOL amongst participants: (1) Flexible labor allocation—whereby people took on tasks according to availability and preference, rather than long-term task specialization; (2) Communication and regularly checking-in when life circumstances change;

and (3) re-valuing unpaid labor. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of how this study contributes to academic performance and perceptions of labor division amongst same-sex couples, and the importance of theoretical frameworks of “doing gender” and “doing heteronormativity” through unpaid labor.

Literature review

Social reproductive labor, including caregiving, childcare, housework, and family management, is often undervalued compared to paid labor (Bahn et al., 2020). While most research on unpaid reproductive labor focuses on the visible tasks of housework and care work, recent feminist scholarship highlights the often invisible emotional and cognitive labor associated with running a household, such as making appointments, life administration, and overseeing the health and wellbeing of family members (Dean et al., 2021). Studies of unpaid labor amongst same-sex couples tend to focus on housework or childcare, although studies of broader unpaid emotional labor that include both heterosexual and same-sex couples show that in comparison to men, women (whether in partnership with a woman or a man) are likely to carry out more caregiving of their partner, even if they are unwell themselves (Umberson et al., 2015 in Thomeer et al., 2020, p. 225). In this study, we follow this recent scholarship by including physical, emotional, and cognitive labor tasks in our conceptualization of unpaid labor.

How people construct their perceptions of the DOL is just as important to understand as how they perform labor. Studies with heterosexual couples have found that unequal divisions of household labor are often regarded as fair, even when unequal, and this sense of fairness may be one reason why the division of labor remains imbalanced (Baxter, 2021; Braun et al., 2008; Young et al., 2015). Furthermore, while equality in the number of hours dedicated to unpaid labor may not be possible or even desirable given different commitments to paid labor and other activities, the perception of fairness is strongly linked to relationship satisfaction (Esmail, 2010, p. 608; Pai, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2021, p. 90).

Same-sex couples' decisions over how to divide labor are commonly explained by approaches including time availability (Gager & Hohmann-Marriot, 2006), relative economic resources (Coltrane, 2000), distributive justice theory (Major, 1987) and gender theory (Dunne, 1998). These theories help explain not only why couples divide labor in particular ways, but also their perceptions of the fairness of their DOL. Time availability and relative resource theories suggests that people assess fairness of unpaid labor division through a rational economic calculation of input into household labor in relation to total work hours spent in paid and unpaid work or in relation to economic resources contributed to the household (Coltrane, 2000; Gager & Hohmann-Marriot, 2006). Distributive justice theory posits that romantic partners evaluate the fairness of the division of household labor based on comparison referents (who they compare themselves with), outcome values (what values they aspire to in the relationship), and justifications (legitimising principles such as who has more time, resources, or personal preferences and cleanliness standards) (Major, 1987; Thompson, 1991). Research with lesbian couples showed that justifications such as one partner having a higher standard of cleanliness, greater time availability, or physical capability, can lead partners to perceive a fair DOL even when both partners were aware that the other was performing more household labor (Esmail, 2010). Gender theory sees both performance of DOL and perceptions of fairness of DOL as influenced by gender processes, which we elaborate next.

Sociological understandings of gender as ‘doing’ conceptualize both sex and gender as socially constructed categories—routinely accomplished in everyday, ongoing social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 2004). Theoretically, same-sex couples are less constrained by prevailing social beliefs about gendered divisions of labor, lacking polarized “gendered scripts”, and making it possible to develop their own approach to labor sharing (Bernardo et al., 2018; Dunne, 2000, p. 13). For this reason, some researchers argue that gender theory is less useful than other

theoretical frames in understanding fairness perceptions amongst same-sex couples (Esmail, 2010). However, other researchers recognize that same-sex and non-binary couples are also doing gender; that is, they are also socialized as men and women and must navigate social pressures and internalized norms of masculinity and femininity (Geist & Ruppner, 2018; Kelly & Hauck, 2015). For example, in a lesbian relationship, a partner who is caring for children at home may do gender by taking on a 'homemaker' role and devaluing their labor in relation to their partner's role as breadwinner (Goldberg, 2013).

The framework of doing gender has sparked much debate about whether gender is inevitably 'done' in social interactions, or whether it can be *undone*. Butler (2004) and Deutsch (2007) argue that people undo gender when they explicitly reject gender norms through their practices (Deutsch, 2007), while other authors suggest that gender can be 'redone' through redefining (rather than explicitly rejecting) qualities associated with masculinity or femininity (Connell, 2010). In this article, we follow Connell's (2010) analysis of gender performance in queer couples as variously 'doing', 'redoing', or 'undoing' gender (see also Civettini, 2015; Goldberg, 2013; Khor, 2007).

Contributions from queer theory recognize the complexity of gender and sexuality as intertwined performative practices, arguing that heteronormativity is also something we 'do' through everyday practice, and, like gender, heteronormativity can also be redone and undone (Connell, 2010; Geist & Ruppner, 2018). Same-sex relationships offer a lens through which to understand how processes of doing gender and heteronormativity operate intersectionally (Geist & Ruppner, 2018). Rather than assuming that same-sex partners will necessarily have similar values or standards, research on fairness perceptions suggest that same-sex couples in contexts where lesbian sexuality has a close connection with feminist ideals and practices can feel pressure to perceive their relationship as egalitarian (Bernardo et al., 2018; Civettini, 2016). In this context, perceptions of fairness may rest not on innate shared values but on negotiation and active communication (Bernardo et al. 2018; Moore, 2008). Thus, it is important to analyze the active strategies couples use to negotiate and make sense of the DOL rather than assume that same-sex couples are necessarily more harmonious and egalitarian (Bernardo et al., 2018).

Beyond sexuality and gender, studies that take an intersectional perspective on the DOL note the importance of other factors in relationships, such as people's age, length of the relationship, and cultural background. In longer-term relationships, some research finds an accumulation of wisdom and experience, which can enable a higher degree of understanding, acceptance, and care toward each other (Thomeer et al., 2020; Umberson et al., 2015). Other research finds that particular social roles, such as motherhood, shapes perceptions (Hornung, 2018). Different ethnic backgrounds and cultural factors also influence the way couples approach the DOL in their relationship (Carriero, 2020, p. 26; Pupo & Duffy, 2012, p. 32). For example, research with first and second generation immigrants living in the US found that people whose country of ancestry had greater gender equality exhibited greater equality in the performance and perceptions of housework, although this depended on the transmission of cultural values through parents (Marcén & Morales, 2019).

Methodology

Author 1 is a sociologist (living in Aotearoa NZ) with interests in feminist theory and labor sociology and is a cis-woman in a long-term heterosexual relationship; Author 2 is a postgraduate researcher (born in Aotearoa NZ but living in Australia) with interests in gender and is a cis-woman in a long-term same-sex relationship. Author 2 carried out most of the interviews, and the participants were made aware that she also lives in a long-term same-sex relationship. Possibly due to this disclosure, we noted that participants appeared at ease during interviews. Author 1 conducted interviews with a couple personally connected to Author 2. Our differing

positionalities vis-à-vis the research topic allowed different insights to emerge during our collaborative process of research design, interviewing, data analysis, and writing.

We recruited participants *via* personal connections and networks that include the wider LGBTIQ+ community in New Zealand and Australia. Inclusion criteria included people identifying as being in a same-sex relationship for more than three years, who were both willing to be interviewed. Ten couples who met the criteria were included in the study. The interviews were conducted in 2021–2022 during the Covid-19 global pandemic, and due to restrictions, all interviews were conducted *via* ZOOM. Our sample of ten couples includes participants from various cultural backgrounds, ages, life stages, and genders (Table 1). We sought to conduct research with same-sex couples broadly conceived, including lesbian, gay, trans, and non-binary couples. Despite multiple forms of recruitment, only one male couple agreed to participate. Thus, the study is heavily weighted toward lesbian same-sex couples, and toward cis-women (only one trans-woman volunteered to participate). Most participants were in their late forties through to mid-seventies and had been together between 6 and 30 years. All the couples had at least one partner in some form of paid employment. Only one participant (C1-A) was not in any form of paid employment at the time. However, C1 was the only couple with 2 dependent children living at home.

An initial interview was carried out with each couple, then separate interviews were carried out with each partner individually; a total of thirty interviews. Interviewing couples separately is a useful method to explore the DOL amongst couples (Baxter, 2021; Downing & Goldberg, 2011; Evertsson et al., 2021; Goldberg, 2013; Kelly & Hauck, 2015). Most such studies only seek individual interviews, which, according to Downing and Goldberg (2011, p. 105), aim to avoid a “co-constructed narrative”. However, we found that carrying out a couple interview followed by individual interviews enabled a relaxed introduction to the study where we could observe the couple’s discussions with each other, followed by a deeper discussion of DOL in individual interviews.

During the couple interview, we learned about participants’ family labor practices, and asked them to discuss how they divide unpaid labor and why they divide tasks the way they do. During individual interviews, we talked through a simple time-use survey with participants, estimating how many hours they and their partner spent on various tasks over the past week (or a typical week if previous week atypical), estimating the split of unpaid labor, and how they

Table 1. Participant profiles.

Participant	Gender	Age	Relationship length	Location	Cultural background	Hours in paid work (per week)	Children at home
1A	Female	56	19 years	NZ	NZ	0	2
1B	Female	45	19 years	NZ	England	35-40	2
2A	Female	54	19 years	NZ	NZ	40	N/A
2B	Female	61	19 years	NZ	NZ	40	N/A
3A	Female	56	18 years	NZ	NZ	20-24	1
3B	Female	44	18 years	NZ	NZ	35-40	1
4A	Female	48	22 years	NZ	NZ	26-30	1
4B	Trans Female	77	22 years	NZ	NZ	40	1
5A	Female	68	30 years	Australia	NZ	5	0
5B	Female	60	30 years	Australia	Australia	37.5	0
6A	Male	55	26 years	Australia	Macedonia	38	N/A
6B	Male	52	26 years	Australia	Australia	30-35	N/A
7A	Female	51	25 years	NZ	NZ	Freelance	N/A
7B	Female	53	25 years	NZ	NZ	40	N/A
8A	Female	58	17 years	Australia	NZ	28	1
8B	Female	60	17 years	Australia	NZ	37.5	1
9A	Female	42	8 years	NZ	Māori	48+	1
9B	Female	47	8 years	NZ	Māori	60+	1
10A	Female	34	6 years	Australia	Australia	28	1
10B	Female	35	6 years	Australia	Australia	35	1

felt about this split. Task categories included: cooking, cleaning, shopping, childcare, other dependent care, planning/appointments, managing household finances, home/yard maintenance, and other, which aimed to capture physical, emotional, and cognitive labor. We recognize this is limited as a device for measuring actual labor time (as it is based on recall and perception of partner's labor); rather, it is useful to understand people's perceptions of their own and their partner's contributions and was a focal point for participants to narrate their thoughts during the interviews. The time-use survey was carried out during the individual interviews rather than the couple interviews so that each participant could estimate how much time they believed their partner spent on any unpaid labor. Several participants noted afterward that the survey was valuable because it made them think about how much time they really spent doing things around the house, to consider whether the current DOL was fair and, if not, to think about doing things differently (e.g., C2, Table 2). The individual interview also enabled participants to talk about their fairness perceptions without their partner present, which in some cases meant that participants spoke about frustrations and grievances, while the couple interviews allowed us to observe the couples interacting with each other during the discussion. Using ZOOM to record the interviews meant we could observe and later analyze non-verbal interactions; for example, some couples were noticeably surprised by each other's perception of how they thought the DOL was carried out in their household, and there was some tension (raised eyebrows, sideways glances) between a couple who felt the DOL was not fair. There was also shared laughter in some couples showing a sense of ease with their DOL arrangements.

Ethics consent for the research was granted by Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The semi-structured interview format avoided directly asking participants to discuss specific tensions or problems, enabling participants to take the lead and discuss only that which they felt comfortable sharing. Before the interviews, all participants were asked if they would like to use a pseudonym to help ensure anonymity. Nine of the twenty participants chose pseudonyms, while the rest expressed a willingness for their given names to be used throughout the study. We recorded interviews (with permission from participants), and then transcribed and analyzed the data. We analyzed the qualitative interview data using NVIVO software to carry out a thematic (inductive) coding analysis. We met regularly; each researcher analyzed the video-recorded interviews and transcripts from every couple, and then compared notes, working together to identify emerging themes. We analyzed the time use survey data by firstly tallying the total hours each participant said they spent on unpaid labor and calculating the proportion of unpaid labor performed by each partner as a percentage split; secondly, we analyzed the time participants said they spent on unpaid labor versus what their partner said and analyzed the level of agreement or disagreement for each couple.

Results and discussion

The construction of fairness and equality in the division of labor

Participants' narratives reveal heterogeneous patterns of labor division influenced by gendered roles and life trajectories, personality, class background, culture, age, and heteronormative social constraints. No couples had an entirely equal division of unpaid labor, although the time use survey suggested that three couples were near-equal, within 5 percentage points of a 50/50 split in terms of each partner's percentage contribution to total hours spent on unpaid labor (See Table 2, column 1). Other couples varied between a 60/40 split up to a 90/10 split for two couples. However, while the DOL may not be *equal*, most participants (14/20) felt that the DOL was *fair* according to their current circumstances. Participants discursively constructed their relationships as fair by citing each partner's different commitments to paid labor, as well as their physical capability to carry out labor and notions of balance and partnership (Table 2, Column 3). Alison's (C8) comment is representative of many participants' sentiments: *"It's not equal, but it's fair... it's because of that sort of,*

Table 2. Estimated labor division and factors influencing fairness perceptions.

Couple	Estimated split of unpaid labor	DOL fair?	Construction of DOL as equal / fair	Factors influencing construction of DOL as (un)fair
C1	Agree Francesca does much more than Charlotte 70/30% split	Francesca DOL fair; Charlotte DOL sometimes unfair	"It's a balance" (Francesca) "Sometimes I feel the piss is being taken – because I like things tidy, she will just let me do things regardless of what is fair.... I need to keep an eye on my boundaries around what is fair." (Charlotte)	Both prioritize family's wellbeing; agreed that one should stay home with kids, so Francesca does this; both value this role. Different standards of cleanliness and different perceptions of available time when at home with kids. Charlotte struggles with spouse's aging and feels they don't communicate enough.
C2	Both feel they do slightly more but similar 55/45% split	Both DOL reasonably fair, but need to renegotiate	"Probably not fair at the moment, I think we probably need to renegotiate a couple of things, and even it up a bit" (Sue) "I think it's fair...mostly manageable, what's not so manageable for me, is the shift in headspace [for Sue], that I am at home, but not available" (Lisa)	Needs readjusting as Sue is in a less stressful job and Lisa has taken on more hours; The time-use survey helped Sue recognize this. Both strive for communication, respect, value unpaid labor Clear roles - Sue cooks and does house and yard maintenance; Lisa cleans, but both recognize cleaning is not as 'fun' or visible as Sue's tasks
C3	Agree Annette does slightly more; but very similar 53/47% split	Both DOL fair:	"Most of the time it feels fair...overall probably 50/50" (Annette) I work longer hours, so sometimes I can't put the energy into the house...but I still think that the time that I am here... it is fair" (Stella)	Both "chip in", both working and have child; Stella longer hours so Annette feels it is fair for her to do more housework Tend to specialize outside/inside, but both help, and try to prevent each other from being "overwhelmed" by anything
C4	Agree Cushla does more, but similar 45/55% split	Cushla DOL fair; Lexie some guilt at not doing enough	"I have a fair degree of guilt around what I don't do, I am not mobile... but there are certain things I do" (Lexie) "Not equal but fair... mentally there is a balance" (Cushla)	Recognize and value contributions of both partners Lexie feels DOL unfair to Cushla as she does less physical labor (mobility issues) but contributes cognitive labor
C5	Agree Jen does much more 90/10% split	Both DOL fair	"Fair because she puts the money in the bank account and for what I do, I get paid" (Jen) "It's a partner-fucking-ship! Haha" (Merryn)	Clear breadwinner/homemaker split; both value unpaid labor 30 years together means they have had time to really work out what works well for them
C6	Agree Michael does much more 90/10% split	Both DOL not fair; George – feels guilty.	"It's definitely not equal, but I'm also not concerned about the fairness. It's taken me a while to get to that point" (Michael) "In my mind, it's not fair...I feel guilty...but I'm not allowed to contribute more" (George)	Different standards Michael does almost all unpaid labor; says it is "my OCD" Cultural influences – Growing up, George's mother did all unpaid labor. He wasn't allowed to do anything, so is not sure how to contribute now.
C7	Agree Virginia does more, but similar 58/43% split	Both DOL fair	"Absolutely fair" (Vita) "It really does [feel fair]" (Virginia)	Vita's job full-time, Virginia freelance, so Virginia sees it as fair to do more; both flexible Regular communication, make it fun and joyful, value unpaid work, flexible

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Couple	Estimated split of unpaid labor	DOL fair?	Construction of DOL as equal / fair	Factors influencing construction of DOL as (un)fair
C8	Agree Alison does more 60/40% split	Both DOL fair	"Not equal, but fair" (Alison) "It feels reasonably fair, except sometimes when I feel I haven't done something and should" (Patricia)	Patricia has "a more full-on, full-time job, so Alison sees it as fair to do more unpaid work. Alison feels the burden of being a parent, "I don't think it weighs on [Patricia] like it weighs on me..."
C9	Agree Merri does more 85/15% split	Both DOL reasonably fair	"It's fair for what we decided on" (Merri) "I would like it to be more equal because that's about fairness...but for now..." (Berri)	Berri has a stressful job (60-70 hrs/week); both value the community advocacy work she does, and Merri is generally happy to take on more UL. Merri, working from home, 'sees' the mess, Berri just doesn't see it. They have a "very different approach and different style" to unpaid work.
C10	Agree Georgia does more 60/40% split	Georgia – DOL fair; Zoe – guilt at not doing enough	"It's fair, because there are times when we completely swap, like when I was pregnant" (Georgia) "It doesn't feel fair, but I try to keep circumstance.... I am feeling pretty shit at the moment... but I feel like this is a moment in time" (Zoe)	Zoe is currently 6 wk pregnant and too nauseous to do more UL, but they take a long-term view, flexible, and recognize that it is fair in the long-term. Similar standards and preferences.

equation that we've made, or that I've decided on, that if Patricia is doing that, then I will do more of this".

Amongst the six participants who felt the DOL was not entirely fair, two participants (Lexie and Zoe) blamed themselves for not doing enough; that is, their sense of unfairness came from their own guilt at having limited mobility (Lexie, C4) or feeling nauseous from pregnancy (Zoe, C10) and therefore not contributing as they wished. For Couple 2, who had recently experienced a career shift (Sue moving to a less stressful role and Lisa moving to full-time work), Sue recognized during the interview process that she had not readjusted the DOL, and she felt she needed to do more. This perception of the DOL as unfair due to a sense that one is putting in less than their partner was also observed in studies of same-sex lesbian couples, and guilt about not pulling one's weight may emerge from women being socialized into expecting they should shoulder greater responsibility for family care (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Only one couple (C1) had divergent view on the fairness of the DOL, with Charlotte struggling with working full-time and taking on a lot of unpaid labor, which she felt her partner "doesn't see". One couple (C6) expressed mutual dissatisfaction with their DOL; however, both partners acknowledged they had reached a compromise over time, a sort of "agreed contract" (George, C6) for the good of the relationship. Below, we examine three key factors that enabled participants to construct their DOL as fair, even when not equal: Flexibility in labor allocation; communication; and revaluing unpaid labor.

Flexibility

Flexible labor allocation—whereby people took on tasks according to availability and preference, rather than long-term task specialization—enabled a sense of fairness amongst many of the

participants. This is suggestive of time availability and relative resource theories where people divide labor based on who has time relative to paid work, as well as distributive justice theory, where people justify differences in labor based on personal preferences, capabilities, and values. While one couple (C3) divided unpaid labor tasks according to gendered norms (one partner did the ‘outdoor work’ and one partner did the ‘housework’), and one couple (C5) had a clear ‘breadwinner’/‘home maker’ split, other couples had varying patterns of task division, as shown in Table 2. Furthermore, even the couples with clear patterns of gendered norms exhibited flexibility over time, a finding in contrast to many studies with heterosexual couples where patterns of labor division are often found to be entrenched and may change only with major life events such as childbirth (Perales et al., 2015).

Several couples discussed how their labor flexibility is related to gender and sexuality, as there is “no script to follow” when it comes to doing the unpaid labor of a household in same-sex relationships (see Goldberg, 2013; Ogolsky et al., 2017; Pai, 2017, p. 211). They articulated a feeling that “*you’re already making your own rules, everything’s up for grabs*” (Virginia, C7). This meant that rather than assuming who would do what (for example, who would give birth), participants had to talk over these decisions, and could make decisions based on what worked for them as a couple at particular times. For many participants, labor “just kind of happens” (Lisa, C2), “it just plays out” (Zoe, C10) or “just works for us”.

Availability was articulated in two ways: firstly, participants flexibly allocated labor based on daily/weekly practices of availability, depending on “*whoever has got the space and time*” (Stella, C3). Secondly, ‘availability’ was in reference to life stage or commitment to other labor. Some couples who affirmed their desire for equality but were not currently taking on an equal division of unpaid labor due to other commitments (e.g., pregnancy, childcare, paid work). They explicitly recognized that availability for unpaid labor would change at different moments in their careers and family formation, and therefore understood the current unequal DOL in the context of previous arrangements or plans. Georgia and Zoe (C10), for example, have mapped out specific pathways to allow them both to birth and raise their children. The couple have been together for six years; however, both said they have strong underlying feminist beliefs, and similar ideals which influence the way they value unpaid labor. Georgia was home on parental leave at the time of the interviews, while Zoe was pregnant with their second child and planned to move into parental leave as Georgia picked up more paid work. Some couples with more task specialization due to skill or preference also displayed flexibility in their long-term approach to task allocation. Couple 7, for example, make sure they each take on some responsibilities for tasks that one of them is normally responsible for, such as cooking or managing household finances, so that the other partner is not “totally dependent” and would not be “bereft” if they died.

Age was an important intersectional factor shaping fairness perceptions. For two of the couples with a large age gap, the younger partners described how they adjusted their sense of fairness as their partners aged and were less able to perform physical tasks. For Couple 4, one partner’s disability limited how much they could contribute physically to the household labor, but her partner affirmed that the relationship was fair:

Not equal, but it is fair ... the physical aspects of it are different to the mental aspects of it, so mentally there is a balance, and I understand the physical imbalance, so it doesn’t seem unfair for me to be doing that side of it (Cushla, C4).

In contrast, Charlotte (C1), who is twelve years younger than her partner, was struggling to come to terms with her partner’s aging:

I know there is 12 years between us, so there is a natural ageing process in terms of energy, have to adjust my expectations of what is feasible to do...it’s not about ‘equal’ you do this amount of work here, and I do this, but sometimes I feel that I need to keep an eye on my boundaries around what is fair.

While most participants did not explicitly link their practices of flexible labor allocation to gender, as they talked through the ways in which their relationship did not conform to any stereotypical masculine or feminine roles, they revealed how they re-did gender through their DOL. Couple 5, for example, laughed as they talked about how their ‘interchangeable’ DOL re-did gendered norms:

Jen: You go out and earn the money, so that’s sort of typically the masculine role.

Merryn: Except I like to wear makeup.

Jen: and [you’re] the one that had the baby...

Merryn: Yeah...um, I can wield the electric drill better, I’m better at the electric drill, but Jen’s better at the lawn mowing than I am... But yeah, you do the cooking and the laundry mostly...

Jen: I think we are very interchangeable in that regard...

Merryn: When we were doing the renovation, we were both hammering the nails in, and putting the boards up, we’d do it together, it’s a partner-fucking-ship...not a ‘you do that, and you do that’...it’s a partnership!

Participants also cited individual preferences or doing “*what we are good at*” (Lisa, C2) as shaping their sense of fairness in the DOL: “*lots of things are done because we are each happy to do certain things* (Lisa, C2). Patricia (C8) talked of the ‘pragmatism’ that shapes their decisions, as there are “*things that each of us might enjoy, like, you know, growing vegetables. Or get irritated by.*” (Patricia, C8). Patricia’s partner Alison felt that they were also lucky to have similar values, noting: “*It would be very hard if one of us was a slob, wouldn’t it?*” (Alison, C8). Alison’s point is important, as we see a difference between couples who identify as having similar values or standards regarding unpaid labor and couples who said they have different standards (with one partner wanting a much cleaner house than the other, for example). Three couples (C1, C6, C9) said they have different standards, and this influenced their perception of fairness. Berri and Merri (C9) recognized in the couple interview their “*very different approach, and different style*”, with Merri desiring a clean, ordered house, and tending to “*see the mess*” as she works from home. They admitted there could be tensions, but they had grown as a couple and it “*feels fair*”, in large part because of their mutual understanding and the value both partners place on the advocacy work Berri does with Māori communities. two participants from different couples put the responsibility for unequal DOL on their own high standards. Charlotte (C1) and Michael (C6) both said they did more unpaid labor than their partners because they verged on OCD and “*need boundaries around what is fair*” (Charlotte, C1). Michael (from the only male couple) said “*he used to really resent*” the way most household tasks were left to him (both he and his partner estimated that he carries out 90% of the unpaid labor), but now he felt differently:

I’ve come to the realisation that the only person I’m really doing it for is me... It’s definitely not equal, but I’m also not concerned about the fairness. It’s taken me a while to get to that point... Because I know now that if I’m kind of like, at the end of my tether, then I can ask. (Michael, C6).

Michael’s partner George contributed his lack of engagement with household labor to his Macedonian cultural background, watching his mother “*waiting hand and foot on people*” and not letting George help. This couple’s discussion suggests that alongside gender, intersectional factors including cultural background shape fairness perceptions.

Communication

Most couples cited communication as a key element in enabling a sense of fairness. Research with heterosexual and same-sex couples suggests that quality of communication is related to the division of housework and perceptions of fairness, with direct, open communication associated

with a greater sense of fairness, while negative communication (such as hostility, or ignoring) is associated with a sense of unfairness (Carlson et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023). Similarly, many participants in our study highlighted that communication enabled a sense of fairness, and they noted not only the quality of open communication but also the frequency. Many spoke about the need to regularly ‘check in’, especially when circumstances change, such as Cushla (C4), who noted that “*certain elements of it have just evolved, and then occasionally we’ll have a conversation... we will probably have that conversation again soon with Lexie starting back up at work... a check in*”. The length of the relationship appeared to be a contributing factor to how successful the communication around unpaid labor was. Merri (couple 9) said the couple have matured during the eight years they have been living together, and any discussions about the DOL are “*not as raw*” because they are “*way better at communicating*”.

Participants also talked about how discrimination they had faced due to their sexuality or gender was part of what enabled them to maintain fairness in their DOL, because they were constantly communicating with each other:

You’re already navigating a world where you’re both women. You are aware that you’re making your own rules that are counter to the mainstream narrative... This way of being apparently mismatched... means that you’re already having conversations about really shitty things like, um do we come out when we check into this motel or not.... Every single thing is something you’re negotiating and talking about. (Vita, C7).

Importantly, participants in couple interviews discussed how they worked through conflicts and different expectations, showing that fairness perceptions are not a natural outcome of shared ideals in same-sex relationships; rather, they are achieved through active communication strategies (see Kurdek, 2007). Couple 7 were also quick to say that they still have conflicts, and “*I’m not gonna pretend that we are the best conflict resolvers ever*”, but they affirmed that “*we keep kind of checking in about it, like we keep checking in about everything*”. (Vita, C7). Being together for a long time could also mean that patterns became entrenched and were unquestioned, however. Charlotte, who felt the DOL was not entirely fair, said in her individual interview that “*we don’t ever sit down and talk about who’s doing what, and is it working, the way we are doing things*” (Charlotte, C1). Couple 2 felt that communication is key to their relationship, and there was a sense of ease and mutual respect toward each other in the couple interview. But they recognized during the interview process that they had not checked in on unpaid labor load since one partner had moved from a stressful full-time paid work to fewer work hours, and they needed to renegotiate.

For Couple 6, the complex interweaving of different family backgrounds and different standards of cleanliness created some tension, and both partners said they did not communicate well about these issues. They were also the only couple who both felt the DOL was unfair. It is tempting to attribute this lack of communication and sense of dissatisfaction to being two men, in contrast to most other participants (all women) who talked at length about communication over the DOL being a foundation of their relationship. While there is some evidence to suggest that men are prone to adopting less effective communication methods, such as “*avoidance, ignoring/stonewalling*” (Carlson et al., 2020, p. 5), however, with just one male couple in our study, we can’t make this assumption. Also, both partners felt communication was improving, as George noted: “*there are times where you butt heads ... then you come back together and make up, and you start growing from those discussions...*” (George, C6).

Re-valuing unpaid labor

A third way in which participants constructed their DOL as fair, even when not equal, was through consciously re-valuing unpaid labor as equal in status and value to paid labor, as an act of love or joy, or as culturally significant labor. This revaluing related to practices of ‘redoing gender’ and ‘redoing heteronormativity’; some couples explicitly revalued unpaid labor as

important and equal in value to paid labor or as acts of love as part of a desire to do gender and sexuality differently. This finding affirms research with lesbian couples in Australia, where those who valued unpaid labor highly said this reduced the “drudgery” of household tasks (Rawsthorne & Costello, 2010, p. 12). For some couples, a rejection of gender norms and political identification as feminist was a cornerstone of their relationship and shaped the value they placed on unpaid labor:

I think we want to feel like we are in an equal partnership. I think that's the main benefit of being in a queer couple, like you have an expectation that you are equal in everything, and we just see so many examples of people that aren't equal, and how unhappy it makes them...I identify as a lesbian, and it's... a bit political for me too... It's really about pushing back on patriarchy. (Georgia, C10)

I remember rebelling against it... I remember like, traveling, not working...or not marrying early, so what was probably expected of me as a female... Because I came from a family where it was definitely male-female, and there was violence ... Those things had me go, “I am not doing that”. (Francesca, C1)

Some participants had gone through horrific experiences due to their sexuality and/or gender, and they articulated these experiences as part of what shaped their desire to do gender differently through revaluing unpaid labor. Participants recalled facing discrimination due to being trans (Lexie, C4), or having a mother who forced them into gay conversion therapy when they came out (Sue, C2), as motivation for revaluing unpaid labor in their own relationships. Sue recalled:

I think growing up and watching my very, very unhappy mother in a miserable marriage doing all the girl stuff around the house, really had quite an impact on me in terms of the kind of life I did not want to lead... I did not want to end up in an unhappy marriage doing all the chores... When we first started living together, we had a few discussions about not wanting to make decisions about “the butch person and the femme person” and the femme person has to do all the girl jobs etc... and we made a concrete decision that is not how we would do things. (Sue, C2).

Some couples took care in the interviews to show that difficult and time-consuming unpaid labor was seen and appreciated:

Georgia: The domestic tasks, we might not enjoy them, but I think we both value them equally, as in, we both think they are important, rather than thinking that's not important, and that'll get done...

Zoe: Like when Georgia was home with our son, I took over when I got home from work. Like she's been changing fucking nappies all day! It was like it wasn't valued, like you have done your job during the day, but I've done my job too”. (Couple 10)

Like Couple 10's insistence on valuing paid and unpaid labor equally, for Jen and Merryn (C5), the current DOL is “ideal” (Merryn) and “perfect” (Jen). Merryn recently moved into full-time work, and Jen now does around 90% of the unpaid labor. But Jen didn't feel this was unfair: “*You've got it see it, that I don't feel like it's unpaid work that I do. Because Merryn puts money in the bank account every fortnight. So, for what I do, I get paid...*”. However, even though this couple consciously revalued unpaid labor as the equivalent of paid labor, Jen discussed in her individual interview how she still struggled to affirm the value of her labor to herself:

Ah well, sometimes I don't think it's equal, that's where I can feel less than, because I don't value my contribution as much as I could. Because I think of stereotypical, ya know, I'm just the housewife... That's a thing that, I just have to not let myself go down that rabbit hole, because it's self-defeating. (Jen, C5)

In Merryn's interview, she recognized that Jen could get ‘really down on herself’, and Merryn would remind her: “*but look at the stuff you do, ya know, shit! ... It feels completely like a partnership, absolutely, I don't resent having to go off to work, it's an agreement...*”.

Intersectional dynamics including class background shaped the value participants placed on unpaid labor. Couple 7, for example, said they recognized how hard unpaid labor is, and their working-class backgrounds with both partners working in hospitality in the past had given them

appreciation that “*toilets do not clean themselves*”. For some couples with children, fears of being judged or discriminated against due to their sexuality led them to worry about maintaining a clean house, an ideal of homemaking that some interviewees saw as “heteronormative” (C10), and a “general societal norm” (C8). Couples C8 and C10 said they made extra efforts with housework and child raising as they were conscious of wanting their children to ‘fit in’, and of the possibility that others would judge them if their house wasn’t nicely presented.

I don’t want to be slovenly, you know, to create too much of a ripple anywhere, we’re respectable...we don’t like to scare the horses. (Alison, C8).

We are a bit more conscious of how other people perceive us, like... we have to fit into a heteronormative world, and so we want to be accepted... So subconsciously that might influence how we keep the house, and how our parenting decisions are, like always trying to do the very best, coz we feel like we are trying to play catch up, or that people might be judging us. (Georgia, C10).

Couple 4 similarly noted their self-consciousness as they “*fit in a little bubble of difference... that says... Transgender woman plus lesbian woman relationship, intergenerational aspect...and [our son] has two biological mums*” (Cushla, C4). However, rather than trying to fit in by performing unpaid household labor to a high standard, Cushla said with some pride that the house “*is not spick and span and everything in its place... it’s our home. we are too busy living*”.

One component of revaluing unpaid labor was finding joy in it. Participants described in sensory detail the joy they took from feeling crisp, clean sheets on the line (Lisa, C2), sifting leaves from the pool (George, C6), or ironing handkerchiefs (Patricia, C8). For some, joy came not from particular tasks, but from being able to carry out unpaid labor when, and how they wanted (Vita, C7). Some constructed their labor as an act of love for their partner. For example, Sue (C2) makes the bed in the morning in a way that ensures the separate duvet layers are flat to suit her partner Lisa’s esthetic needs, and then remakes it at night, ready for sleeping. While George (C6) undertakes specific household tasks simply because he enjoys them, he is also conscious of the fact that taking care of certain things around the house is a way of caring for Michael: “*I’ve cleaned the kitchen, and I know that Michael’s going to really appreciate that tomorrow when he gets up to make his coffee...yeah, it’s those kinds of things that I like*”. These practices resonate with research by Arlie Hochschild and others who argue that a successful relationship doesn’t just depend on how partners divide labor, but on how they each express gratitude for the labor their partner contributes (Alberts et al., 2011; Hochschild, 2003). In this ‘economy of gratitude’, what each person counts as a gift is determined by cultural values, norms, and social power (Hochschild, 2003, p. 104). While Sue (C2) making the bed twice each day could in some couples suggest subjugation, this couple’s interactions during the couple interview revealed the mutual acknowledgement of this act as a gift that recognizes the amount of unpaid labor Lisa performs.

A third component to revaluing unpaid labor amongst the participants was cultural influences, an intersectional factor which is less discussed in the literature. Couple 9, who are both Māori, were bemused at our questions about dividing household labor as they did not construct unpaid work as separate from other domains of labor:

I think it’s interesting to compartmentalise the idea of unpaid work, and paid work, when it’s just life... like, the cultural paradigms that we sit in, and the value of that with me, you know, go there... and do the dishes... because so and so’s passed away...or clean the marae because it needs doing. Things like obligations and duty of care – those are the things that drive...those situations. [In] our [Māori] worldview and our reality... it’s not considered *one or the other*... it just ‘is’... (Merri, C9).

According to Merri and Berri, for Māori who are brought up with traditional values and connected to their marae (Māori community meeting place), you learn from a young age to just do any of the mahi (work) that needs to be done—this mahi is, according to Merri, a “*requirement of life*”. Berri talked about these unpaid tasks as being part of the continuum of

whakapapa (heritage/genealogy and Māori identity), and thus these were highly valued in the household, and community, paid and unpaid domestic labor had to be viewed together.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study builds on previous research to explore how people in same-sex relationships divide labor, and what factors influence their perceptions of fairness in the DOL. Previous research shows that perceptions of fairness in the DOL are fundamental to the happiness, satisfaction, and potential stability of a relationship (Carlson et al., 2020; Crouch et al., 2014; Downing & Goldberg, 2011), and that a desire for equality may create dissonance when couples are not able to enact equality in unpaid labor, due, for example, to uneven paid work hours or community or family obligations (Goldberg, 2013). We identified three factors that enabled participants to perceive their relationship as fair, even if not equal. These included *flexibility* in labor allocation, *communication*, and *revaluing* unpaid labor.

Our study contributes to theorization of how couples construct perceptions of fairness. We found some support for relative resource theory and time availability theory, with couples citing different economic inputs and time availability to the household as reasons that it was fair they take on more unpaid labor, but most couples constructed their DOL as fair for reasons other than rational calculations of resources or time. Participants discussed how there was “no script to follow” when it comes to doing unpaid labor in same-sex relationships. This meant that they tended to actively negotiate their roles in the household—focusing on availability and preference, rather than any assumptions about who would do what. Thus, to some extent, our study agrees with literature discussing how the lack of gendered assumptions in same-sex relationships provides freedom for couples to redo gender through their labor practices (see Goldberg, 2013; Ogolsky et al., 2017; Pai, 2017, p. 211), even if they don’t articulate gender as a central element shaping their DOL. In contrast to justifications of differences in unpaid labor input that reproduce entrenched gendered differences in heterosexual relationships, our participants exhibited flexibility in labor division in both the short and long-term.

We also show that participants were aware of gender and how it shaped their relationships. They talked about how gendered socialization influenced them growing up, how they navigated discrimination and heteronormative assumptions, and how some consciously sought to undo gender through the rejection of gender norms in the ways they performed labor. Couples 7 and 10, for example, both spoke of their feminist principles as foundational to their relationship, and both sought to undo gender through explicitly rejecting gender norms and practicing alternative models of labor division. Couple 10 discussed the gendered constraints women, particularly mothers, face in the labor market, and they planned their working/family lives so that both partners would be able to progress in paid work by taking turns as the main caregiver. Couple 7 recognized that task specialization could lead to dependence, and consciously discussed and practiced task sharing to avoid this. This couple articulated a desire to undo gender through their attention to fairness in the DOL as a product of their feminist and queer values, their experience freelancing, where they had to be flexible with dividing labor, and their class backgrounds.

Even in cases where practices of labor could be seen as doing gender—for example, through the ways participants conceptualized their labor as acts of love for their partner, to the extent of making and remaking the bed each day because their partner loves it this way—participants articulated these acts not as feminine attentiveness and subordination to their partner, but as an act of care that brought happiness to both partners. What appeared to underpin these practices was a trust and relatively equal power relations between partners, whereby the labor was enacted because of a desire to do so rather than a feeling of obligation. We see this labor as an example of redoing gender, through revaluing unpaid labor, and thus redefining (rather than explicitly rejecting) qualities associated with masculinity or femininity.

We also contribute to scholarship on same-sex DOL by showing that sexuality needs to be analyzed as intersectional with other factors that shape decisions and practices of embodied reproductive labor, including gender, age, disability, class, and culture. Our approach recognizes that same-sex couples are neither homogenous in practices nor discursive perceptions; contrary to any assertion that same-sex couples share labor equally, our participants varied widely in the ways they divide up unpaid labor. We therefore recognize that the way people divide and make sense of unpaid labor emerges from complex social relations and practices of negotiation, in which sexuality alongside gender, cultural background and other intersectional factors shape people's practices and sense making. Participants reconfigured the meaning of housework through class and cultural lens, wherein they considered housework as equally valued, and, for the Māori participants in the study, as indivisible from other forms of paid and unpaid community labor. This attention to intersectional identities builds on work on culture and same-sex couples' DOL in Japan (Kamano, 2009) and amongst Black lesbian mothers in the US (Moore, 2008); here, we attended to both the cultural, class and age dynamics that shape gendered relationships. The re-negotiation of DOL can be fraught in couples where there is a large age gap (as was the case in two of our couples) and the DOL needs to change due to aging and the need for one partner to be cared for, or to perform less or different forms of labor.

Finally, our study contributes to discussions of 'doing heteronormativity' in same-sex relationships, by pointing to the emotional and cognitive labor required for people in same-sex relationships and for non-binary people to move through the heteronormative world, and how this labor shapes the DOL. Some participants talked of how the labor involved in everyday decisions such as booking a hotel room, whether to come out in social situations, or managing relationships with family members, meant they were already constantly negotiating and communicating, so that communication became core to their relationship. Others (all parents) felt pressure for their division and performance of household labor to be seen as respectable through a heteronormative lens. Participants' labor practices both affirmed and challenged heteronormative understandings of the home as a nuclear family space in which motherhood carries connotations of being a good homemaker, keeping a clean respectable house, and raising children to be well-behaved (Gorman-Murray, 2007). Both C8 and C10 feel pressure to carry out housework to a high standard to ensure they present as respectable mothers, conform to "heteronormative" (C10), "general societal norms of having a clean household" (C8), and thus avoid any discrimination targeting their children. While homes are key sites where same-sex couples enact resistance to heteronormativity through relating intimately with partners in ways they may avoid in public (Gorman-Murray, 2007), here we see a conception of home as a space that is still on public display. For Couple 4, in contrast, not paying too much attention to the housework was a form of undoing gender and heteronormativity, as they proudly asserted that they were too busy living to worry about what others thought.

Overall, we suggest that these findings are relevant for all relationships. They suggest active social practices that couples can engage that are important for achieving relationship satisfaction, even when a 50/50 split of unpaid labor is not possible. *Flexibility* in labor allocation, *communication*, and *revaluing* unpaid labor are strategies available to anyone. Future research in this area could further explore the ways in which people revalue unpaid labor—and even exhibit ontologically different conceptions of labor that emerge from cultural practices—rather than assuming that 'unpaid household labor' is a discrete, stable category.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This study was supported by the Massey University Research Fund.

References

- Alberts, J., Tracy, S., & Trethewey, A. (2011). An integrative theory of the division of domestic labor: Threshold level, social organizing and sensemaking. *Journal of Family Communication*, 11(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/015267431.2011.534334>
- Aspin, C., & Hutchings, J. (2007). Reclaiming the past to inform the future: Contemporary views on Maori sexuality. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 9(4), 415–427. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20460942> <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050701195119>
- Bahn, K., Cohen, J., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2020). A feminist perspective on COVID-19 and the value of care work globally. *Gender, Work & Organisation*, 27(5), 695–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12459>
- Baxter, J. (2021). Sharing of housework in couple families of 2020 (Report No. 5). Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Bernardo, G., Avilés, N., & Berbén, A. (2018). Doing gender in Spanish same-sex couples. The distribution of housework and childcare. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(6), 672–682.
- Borah Hazarika, O., & Das, S. (2021). Paid and unpaid work during the Covid-19 pandemic: A study of the gendered division of domestic responsibilities during lockdown. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(4), 429–439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863202>
- Braun, M., Lewin-Epstein, N., Stier, H., & Baumgärtner, M. K. (2008). Perceived equity in the gendered division of household labor. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(5), 1145–1156. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00556.x>
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. Routledge.
- Carlson, D. L., Miller, A. J., & Rudd, S. (2020). *Division of housework, communication, and couples' relationship satisfaction* (vol. 6, pp. 1–17). Sociological Research for a Dynamic World.
- Carriero, R. (2020). The role of culture in the gendered division of domestic labor: Evidence from migrant populations in Europe. *Acta Sociologica*, 64(1), 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699320930073>
- Church, C. (2020). *Same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples: More alike than different?*. SMART Couples, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida.
- Civettini, N. (2015). Gender display, time availability, and relative resources: Applicability to housework contributions of members of same-sex couples. *International Social Science Review*, 91(1), 1–34.
- Civettini, N. (2016). Housework as non-normative gender display among lesbians and gay men. *Sex Roles*, 74(5–6), 206–219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0559-9>
- Clarke, A. Y., & McCall, L. (2013). ‘Intersectionality and social explanation in social science research. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10(2), 349–363. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000325>
- Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1208–1233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x>
- Connell, C. (2010). Doing, undoing or redoing gender? Learning from the workplace experiences of transpeople. *Gender & Society*, 24(1), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209356429>
- Craig, L., & Churchill, B. (2021). Unpaid work and care during COVID-19: Subjective experiences of same-sex couples and single mothers in Australia. *Gender & Society*, 35(2), 233–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211001303>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039> <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Crouch, S. R., Waters, E., McNair, R., Power, J., & Davis, E. (2014). Parent-reported measures of child health and wellbeing in same-sex parent families: A cross-sectional survey. *BMC Public Health*, 14(1), 635. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/635> <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-635>
- Daminger, A. (2020). De-gendered processes, gendered outcomes: How egalitarian couples make sense of non-egalitarian household practices. *American Sociological Review*, 85(5), 806–829. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420950208>
- Dean, L., Churchill, B., & Ruppner, L. (2021). The mental load: Building a deeper theoretical understanding of how cognitive and emotional labor overload women and mothers. *Community, Work & Family*, 25(1), 13–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2021.2002813>
- Dempsey, D. (2013). *Same-sex parented families in Australia*. CFC Paper No. 18. <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/same-sex-parented-families-australia>
- Deutsch, F. M. (2007). Undoing gender. *Gender & Society*, 21(1), 106–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206293577>
- Dickson, N., van Roode, T., Cameron, C., & Paul, C. (2013). Stability and change in same-sex attraction experience, and Identity by sex and age in a New Zealand birth cohort. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 42(5), 753–763. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-012-0063-z>
- Downing, J. B., & Goldberg, A. E. (2011). Lesbian mothers' constructions of the division of paid and unpaid labor. *Feminism & Psychology*, 21(1), 100–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353510375869>
- Dunne, G. A. (1998). Pioneers behind our own front doors: Towards greater balance in the organisation of work in partnerships. *Work, Employment & Society*, 12(2), 273–295. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23747545> <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017098122004>
- Dunne, G. A. (2000). Opting into motherhood: Lesbians blurring the boundaries and transforming the meaning of parenthood and kinship. *Gender & Society*, 14(1), 11–35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/190420> <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124300014001003>
- Esmail, A. (2010). Negotiating fairness: A study on how lesbian family members evaluate, construct, and maintain “fairness” with the division of household labor. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57(5), 591–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918361003711881>

- Evertsson, M., Eriksson Kirsch, M., & Geerts, A. (2021). Family sociological theories questioned: Same-sex parent families sharing work and care. In N.F. Schneider & M. Kreyenfeld (Eds.), *Research handbook on the sociology of the family* (pp. 373–385). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gager, C. T., & Hohmann-Marriott, B. (2006). Distributive justice in the household: A comparison of alternative theoretical models. *Marriage & Family Review*, 40(2-3), 5–42. https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v40n02_02
- Geist, C., & Ruppanner, L. (2018). Mission impossible? New housework theories for changing families. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(1), 242–262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12245>
- Goldberg, A. (2013). “Doing” and “undoing” gender: The meaning and division of housework in same-sex couples. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 5(2), 85–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12009>
- Gorman-Murray, A. (2007). Reconfiguring domestic values: Meanings of home for gay men and lesbians. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 24(3), 229–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036090701374506>
- Henrickson, M. (2006). Kō wai ratou? Managing multiple identities in lesbian, gay and bisexual New Zealand Māori. *New Zealand Sociology*, 21(2), 251–273.
- Henrickson, M. (2010). Civilized unions, civilized rights: Same-sex relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 22(1–2), 40–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538720903332214>
- Hill Collins, P., & Bilgeaspin, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Medford. Polity.
- Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M., & Lyons, A. (2020). *Private lives 2: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia*. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/work/private-lives-3>
- Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The economy of gratitude. The commercialization of intimate life*. University of California Press.
- Hornung, M. (2018). The perception of fairness in the division of labor across the transition to Parenthood. Masters dissertation. Stockholm University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-162355>
- Kamano, S. (2009). Housework and lesbian couples in Japan: Division, negotiation and interpretation. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32(2), 130–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2009.03.001>
- Kelly, M., & Hauck, E. (2015). Doing housework, redoing gender: Queer couples negotiate the household division of labor. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 11(5), 438–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2015.1006750>
- Khor, D. (2007). Doing gender. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 3(1), 35–73. https://doi.org/10.1300/J461v03n01_03
- Kurdek, L. A. (2007). The allocation of household labor by partners in gay and lesbian couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, 132–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X06292019>
- Li, X., Jin, B., Kelley, H. H., et al. (2023). *Work-family conflicts and perceived fairness of housework division in dual-earner couples during COVID-19*. Sex Roles.
- Major, B. (1987). Gender, justice and psychology of entitlement. In P. Shaver & C. Hendrick (Eds.), *Sex and gender* (pp. 124–148). Sage.
- Marcén, M., & Morales, M. (2019). *Gender division of household labor: How does culture operate?* [Discussion Paper, No. 373]. Global Labor Organization (GLO), Essen. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/201505/1/GLO-DP-0373.pdf>
- Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Experiences of crime by sexual orientation: NZ Crime and Victims Survey*. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/NZCVS-LGB-Final.pdf>
- Moore, M. (2008). Gendered power relations among women: A study of household decision making in black, lesbian stepfamilies. *American Sociological Review*, 73(2), 335–356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240807300208>
- Ogolsky, B. G., Monk, J. K., Rice, T. M., Theisen, J. C., & Maniotes, C. R. (2017). Relationship maintenance: A review of research on romantic relationships. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 9(3), 275–306. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12205>
- Pai, I. E. Y. (2017). Egalitarian Lesbian Relationships? In *Sexual identity and lesbian family life, gender, sexualities and culture in Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4005-4_7
- Perales, F., Baxter, J., & Tai, T. O. (2015). Gender, justice and work: A distributive approach to perceptions of housework fairness. *Social Science Research*, 51, 51–63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.12.010>
- Perlesz, A., Power, J., Brown, R., McNair, R., Schofield, M., Pitts, M., Barrett, A., & Bickerdike, A. (2010). Organising work and home in same-sex parented families: Findings from the work love play study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(4), 374–391. <https://doi.org/10.1375/anft.31.4.374>
- Pupo, N., & Duffy, A. (2012). Unpaid work, capital and coercion. *Work, Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 6(1), 27–47.
- Rawsthorne, M., & Costello, M. (2010). Cleaning the sink: exploring the experiences of Australian lesbian parents reconciling work/family responsibilities. *Community, Work & Family*, 13(2), 189–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800903259777>
- Thomeer, M. B., Umberson, D., & Reczek, C. (2020). The gender-as-relational approach for theorizing about romantic relationships of sexual and gender minority mid-to-later-life adults. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 12(2), 220–237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12368>
- Thompson, L. (1991). Family work women's sense of fairness. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12(2), 181–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251391012002003>
- Umberson, D., Thomeer, M. B., & Lodge, A. C. (2015). Intimacy and emotion work in lesbian, gay, and heterosexual relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(2), 542–556. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12178>

- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>
- Wilkins, R., Vera-Toscano, E., Botha, F., & Dahmann, S. C. (2021). *The household income and dynamics in Australia survey: Selected findings from waves* (pp. 1–19). Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research.
- Young, M., Wallace, J. E., & Polachek, A. J. (2015). Gender differences in perceived domestic task equity: A study of professionals. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36(13), 1751–1781. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13508403>